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Mutek 10's Inter_Sections Program: *rapprochements* with and within the urban environment

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[See table of contents](#)

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Mutek 10's Inter_Sections Program: *rapprochements* with and within the urban environment

For its tenth anniversary edition the internationally acclaimed festival Mutek added a series of urban performances and installations that are closer to the visual arts domain than most of the festival's events which are primarily focused on electronic music in its various forms. This series segment, called Inter_Sections, broadened the festival's range of artistic expression and fulfilled Mutek's spelled out¹ promise to bring us *digital creativity* as well as *electronic music*. Nearly all of the Inter_Sections events—the notable exception being the *Play* section, which was dedicated to musical and sonic experimentation—were anchored, albeit to varying degrees, in the various modalities of the visual (architectural video projec-

tions, interactive screens, kinetic performances, light/sound installations, etc). Upon glancing back it dawned upon me that these presentations could be fruitfully regarded under the light of a *rapprochement*; of a coming together of elementary forces into more complex forms; of human visions and urban movements articulated in novel idioms.

This notion of *rapprochement*, though in terms not immediately evident, permeated the monumental and stunning live multimedia work *Atom* by Robert Henke and Christopher Bauder presented at the Théâtre Maisonneuve. The performance consisted of a matrix set-up of 64 helium-filled white balloons illuminated by dimmable LED lights, a computer-controlled cable winch



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Make Out*, installation dans l'espace urbain dans le cadre de MUTEK_10, 2009. Photo : Recherche Antimodular Inc.

system allowing the balloons to rise and descend (manipulated in real-time by Bauer), and a sound composition (performed live by Henke). The elegant interplay of waxing and waning lights, gently floating spheres and sweeping ambient music provided a glimpse into the micro world of atoms swirling together into molecular arrangements—a poetic transposition of elemental and infinitesimal rapprochements writ large for our perceptual delight. Atom proved to be a mesmerizing experience that also encapsulated the coming together of various artistic terrains (music, light, and kinetic sculpture) indicative of promising avenues for artistic hybridizations which make use of the digital and many creative forms and tools beside it.

A similar mode of elemental phenomenal rapprochement was made effective in the installation *Beyond6281* presented at the Place des arts by the Montréal-based collective artificiel. This installation invited the viewer to approach an arrangement of large 1000W light bulbs in order to experience these objects as bearers of strange and intriguing sounds and not just as sources

of illumination. Having been fed amplified audio signals these light sources performed the function of curious music instruments that only produce light as a side effect. This inversion of expectations and perceptual play with something as close at hand as household electricity and banal light bulbs awakened one to pay heed to the mysterious marvels whispering in our intimate technological surroundings.

The remaining Inter_Sections interventions—aptly termed Extra_Muros—took to the streets of Montréal in an exploration of our relations to the urban environment and relationships within it. Dominique T Skoltz used the St. Laurent Cooper building both as the projection surface and integral part of the storyline of her photographic sequence Dislock_ showing various episodic moments of a man and a woman's passionate rapprochements. This need to reach out to one another within the anonymity of city life is also at the centre of the (a)muse collective's *The Good Conspiracy* project. Within the framework of this broader project (launched at the 2009 Montréal Biennale) for the Extra_Muros component the kind conspirators set up an interactive video projection on a St. Laurent Building in order to allow live cellphone text and internet messages to stimulate and feed an ongoing stream of reciprocal positivity and good will, both on the street level and in the halls of virtual communication.

In a more globally situated vein, the internationally acclaimed artist, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, presented his take on the worldwide phenomenon of kissing and how nothing ever happens if somebody doesn't make the first move. The interactive projection titled *Make Out* involved a large video projection of thousands of Internet derived video clips showing couples in various stages of kissing. At first the projection is designed to only show the couples in their pre-kiss face-to-face stances. The simple but ingenious trick behind the installation is that for the lip-to-lip *rapprochement* to commence, a viewer must initiate some kind of movement in front of the screen (a tracking device then triggers the multiple-screen windows into the kiss phase). This virtual and delocalized mass representation thus requires the intervention of a moving and geographically situated body. Through this large interactive tableau—ironically projected on the remaining wall of a former peepshow hall—Lozano-Hemmer manages to encapsulate the paradox of a communication society in which a universal expression of bodily union takes place in fragmented and disembodied screen spaces. Through their sheer number and sociological diversity the viewer-activated kissing couples can alternately be viewed as a commentary on atomized virtual voyeurism or a warm-hearted tribute to the multiple faces of human desire regardless of how it is framed.

The reassessment of our urban environment and how we negotiate our place within it was given a somewhat different twist in the performance *Auto-Fiction* by the dance collective Human Playground and the choreographer Christine Joy Ritter. Unlike the interventions, there were no projections or other visual digital mediations involved in this charged *rapprochement* between a car and human dancers. Unlike the customary interaction with cars, which involves a relatively immobile human and a moving vehicle, here the equation was inverted, since it was the dancers who did all the kinetics while the car remained stationary to become a disputed terrain. A telling take on our relationship to



ATOM 1, Robert Henke + Christopher Bauder. © MUTEK2009 - Miguel Legault.

the automobile that challenges the dominant of forms of mobility—particularly in North American cities—and invites one to envisage other more sensible forms of getting about.

In allowing this diversity of expression to furtively or ostentatiously take up residence within Montréal's streets and other unexpected locations, the digital creativity component of Mutek succeeded in broadening both its viewership and its artistic spectrum. By virtue of this alone, one can only laud Mutek's *Inter_Sections/Extra_Muros* initiative which brought about a *rapprochement* in its own right by stepping beyond the festivals accustomed turf to reach out into other spaces in order to surprise, enchant and capture unsuspecting eyes, ears and feet, thus clear-

ing a new path for another decade of fruitful experimentations in the process.

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Bernard Schütze est théoricien de la communication, critique d'art et traducteur. Ses essais ont été publiés dans plusieurs revues d'art au Canada et en Europe. Il a présenté des communications et il a écrit des textes dans le cadre de plusieurs événements artistiques et d'expositions au Canada et en Europe. Il a également traduit, entre autres, des œuvres de Jean Baudrillard, de Félix Guattari et de Heiner Müller. Il vit et travaille à Montréal.

NOTE

¹ As stated in its title: Mutek_10, International Festival of Digital Creativity and Electronic Music.



ATOM 1, Robert Henke + Christopher Bauder. © Caroline Hayeur / Agence Stock Photo.com.